

The Second Decade

David C. Wilson (Editor, 1968–74)

When I took over as the second editor, resigning from the British Diplomatic Service to do so and as an opportunity to work in my spare time on a PhD relating to modern China, *The China Quarterly* had already established itself as the leading English-language journal on contemporary China under its founder-editor, Rod MacFarquhar. Rod had done a superb job as the first editor and was moving on to play a role in British political life as a Member of Parliament and from thence to Harvard and academic distinction. *The China Quarterly* too was moving, from its earlier position as one of a group of journals funded by the International Association for Cultural Freedom, to coming under the wing of the newly established Contemporary China Institute at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. There, that great scholar on the life and political thought of Mao Zedong, Stuart Schram, had just been appointed Director.

It was right, and timely, that *The China Quarterly* should be given the firm academic base that has remained its hallmark ever since. It was an oddity though that the world's leading journal for the study of contemporary China should be UK-based. By far the largest number of China scholars in the Western world was in the United States. A majority of contributors and readers of *The China Quarterly* were American. But the UK base was a distinct advantage. The distant and pernicious shadow of McCarthy persisted after his death to make objective study of China in the United States still a contentious issue. For American academics working on China it was virtually impossible to visit mainland China. For all its relative lack of China scholars, Britain was a better home for the leading journal on China than the United States. Nevertheless, without its range of excellent contributors from the United States, and some from elsewhere outside the UK, *The China Quarterly* would have been an anaemic creature. Similarly, were it not for the very substantial resources devoted to the study of China in the United States, the non-China world would have been even more seriously ill-informed than it was about what was happening to that highly significant quarter of mankind. The turmoil and conflicting passions aroused by the years of the Cultural Revolution in China, together with the student upheavals of the late 1960s in the Western World, made it even more desirable that a journal like *The China Quarterly* should be published from the relative calm of a leafy square in London's university quarter.

It is a great tribute to successive editors, and to the intellectual liveliness of China scholars, that *The China Quarterly* has continued to flourish so effectively. The enormous changes that have taken place in China since those days, and the vastly different conditions for access to and involvement with China, do not

remove the need for serious study of contemporary China by scholars round the world. If anything they should enhance it, making such study even more significant as China increasingly plays a major role in world affairs. What is encouraging is to see how much such important work is no longer a matter of those outside peering in through a half-closed door to try to discern what is happening inside, but a co-operative effort which involves scholars from within China similarly engaged in a study of their own society and its history. Here lies an area for greater development during *The China Quarterly's* next 50 years.

For me personally, editing *The China Quarterly*, and the opportunity that gave to meet and interact with so many knowledgeable China scholars all round the world, was hugely satisfying and worthwhile.

It is a great pleasure to have seen *The China Quarterly* continuing to flourish greatly in the last 30 or more years and to see it maintaining its role as the leading English-language journal on contemporary and modern China. During my period as editor, we re-designed the cover of *The China Quarterly*. Some elements of that design have since been modified. But the central element remains – an elegant depiction of the character “zhong.” It came from a collection of Chinese calligraphy belonging to Robin McLaren, later British Ambassador to Beijing. It was there, of course, to stand for China. But it was there also to represent symbolically the objectives of the journal – to be unbiased, objective and wavering neither to the left nor to the right. Long may *The China Quarterly* continue to fulfil such worthwhile aims.